

# FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

## The Saskatchewan Association of Architects Celebrates Its Centennial

EVOLUTION to MODERN SCALE & DESIGN: 1965 to 2011 | Last of a Four Part Series for WORTH Magazine

**ADVENT OF THE HIGH-RISE TOWER** While high-rise buildings were common occurrences throughout the world by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, they did not really come into their own in Saskatchewan until the 1950s and 1960s, when about a dozen buildings 10 storeys high or higher were constructed in Regina and Saskatoon. True, Regina boasted the 10 storey McCallum Hill Building and Saskatoon had its eight storey Canada Building, erected during the pre World War I boom era. However, between 1912 and the mid 1950s, only two new skyscrapers were constructed in the province, both by out-of-province corporations: the CPR's 14 storey Hotel Saskatchewan (1928), and the CNR's 10 storey Bessborough Hotel (1935).

**B**Y MID CENTURY, the light-weight curtain wall had replaced the heavier masonry bearing wall, and building heights responded accordingly. Usually built as business offices, their construction often came at the cost of existing fine historic architecture. In Saskatoon, the seven storey Standard Trust Building was demolished in 1976 to make way for the 13 storey Sturdy-Stone Building, a Brutalist structure with an over-all A-frame design..

One of Saskatchewan's most renowned modern buildings, the SaskPower Head Office in Regina, was designed by Joseph Pettick. Its curved facade and rooftop gallery were prominent features, and made the building a must-see landmark for decades after its completion in 1963.



Above: A unique design by Saskatoon architects Forrester, Scott, Bowers, Cooper and Walls, the Sturdy-Stone Building was erected in Saskatoon in 1977.

Right: Curved facade of Regina's SaskPower Head Office

Other higher office and residential structures followed, but many reflected traditional rectangular box-like designs, some with greater or lesser volumes of glass and concrete exteriors. Not until the late 1970s and early 1980s did glass become a particularly

popular exterior cladding, with the most noticeable of those being the twin McCallum-Hill Towers in Regina, erected in 1985 and 1992. With their slanted corners, they replaced the McCallum Hill Building as the most prominent office buildings in that city.





Left: First Nations University of Canada, on the University of Regina campus, opened in 1993.

Above: Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon, with its unique open tepee design roof.

## First Nations Architectural Achievements

During the last quarter of the 20th century, dramatic new public architecture began to appear on First Nation reserves, especially in the design of schools and band offices. As well, Saskatchewan's best-known First Nations museum – Wanuskewin Interpretive Centre - was erected on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Designed by the Saskatoon firm of AODBT Architecture and Interior Design, it opened in 1992. A decade later, in Regina, the First Nations University of Canada moved into the trademark curved structure from the design of Douglas Cardinal, one of Canada's foremost modern architect.

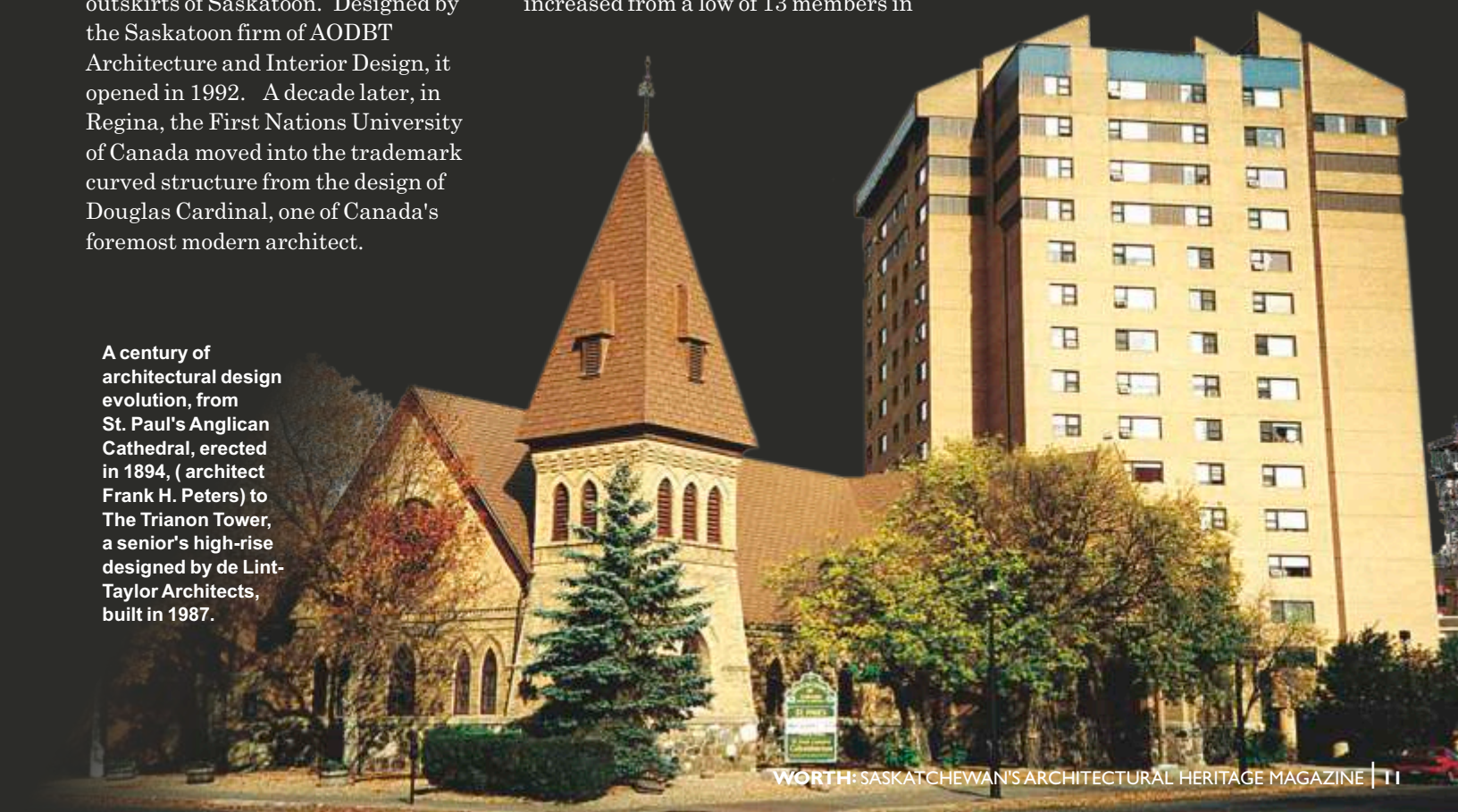
A century of architectural design evolution, from St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral, erected in 1894, ( architect Frank H. Peters) to The Trianon Tower, a senior's high-rise designed by de Lint-Taylor Architects, built in 1987.

## Growth in the SAA

Meanwhile, the SAA too faced changes, as the number of new members registering with the Association increased with the improvement of Saskatchewan's economy. Enrolment with the SAA had increased from a low of 13 members in



1944, to 65 in 1965, about 70 in 1975, and then around the 100 mark throughout the 1980s. A steady membership climb occurred during the 1990s, with membership reaching 154 in 2000 and an all time high of 292 in 2011. This steady increase in members saw the Association hire Eileen Hippe in 1959 as its first full time secretary.





# Let the Good A History of BL



The McCallum-Hill Centre, Tower One, Regina (left), designed by New York architects Skidmore Owings & Merrill, with BLM Architects.

## The Heritage Conservation Movement and Urban Renewal

While new construction was always at the forefront of the SAA's activities, a movement to preserve important components of our architectural heritage began to be heard in the mid 1960s and 1970s as major community landmarks were being demolished. Architect Tom White was among the early proponents to preserve key elements of Saskatchewan's architectural heritage, and to have them rehabilitated for ongoing use. Many fine historic buildings were demolished during the past four decades, including Regina's City Hall, Moose Jaw's Victoria School, and Saskatoon's Capitol Theatre. The loss of these buildings engaged public interest and helped create municipal and provincial legislation and societies that focused on preserv-

ing our architectural heritage. In consequence, various SAA members became actively involved with restoring or rehabilitating historic buildings, and now include these among some of the major achievements within their portfolios.

## A New Century for Saskatchewan Architecture

As 2011 ends, members of the SAA look to 2012 as the beginning of a new century of architectural design achievement in Saskatchewan.

Exactly what the next 100 years will bring is totally unknown, but unquestionably there will be new construction, there will be more demolition of past construction, and some of our current stock of old and new architecture will be formally recognized for its contribution to our collective heritage.

On various occasions throughout the 20th century, SAA members have called for the establishment of a School of Architecture in Saskatchewan. Will the 21st century see that objective realized? And if so, will Saskatchewan-trained architects bring a bold new design to the prairie landscape?W

• By Frank Korvemaker,  
S.A.A. (Hon.)

## FOLLOWING THE SECOND

**WORLD WAR**, Saskatchewan entered a period of construction hyper-activity. The groundwork for some of this growth was established by The Saskatchewan Reconstruction Act, announced in the new CCF government's first Throne Speech on October 19, 1944. Modern infrastructure improvements throughout the province quickly followed. The Rural Electrification Act, passed in 1949, enabled the electrification of rural Saskatchewan and reduced the gulf between rural and urban people. Between 1951 and 1961 Saskatchewan's population grew over 11% - from 831,728 to 925,181. In a speech at Biggar a month before the June 15th, 1944 provincial election, T.C. Douglas promised that, if elected, his party would set up medical, dental and hospital services "available to all without counting the ability of the individual to pay." Douglas made good on his promise and architects such as H.K. (Ken) Black quickly went to work on health care facilities as well as schools, churches, commercial and public buildings throughout the province.

## Ken Black: In the Right Place at the Right Time

In the summer of 1934, with the Depression bringing the province to a standstill, Ken Black landed a job as a draftsman with Regina architects Van Egmond and Storey. When recollecting those hot summer days largely spent gazing out over the sun-baked city from the firm's 10th floor offices in the McCallum Hill Building, he would say: "the only thing on the boards at that time was the provincial Liberal election campaign. Van Egmond was a good Grit, so that's what everybody worked on; the campaign. That summer, it was the **ONLY** thing that Saskatchewan architects were working on."





# Times Roll M Architects



May, 1935 - Graduation day for Ken Black, age 23.

Following his summer on the hustings/drafting table, Ken Black returned to the University of Toronto and graduated with a B. Arch and an engineering option. After graduation he worked as a construction engineer with the PFRA in Swift Current. In 1937 he went back to Toronto and worked for Chapman & Oxley, a large Toronto architectural practice. Just before war broke out, he tried a short-lived partnership with John B. Parkin, a U of T classmate, then



Sub-Lieutenant Black in 1944.

returned to Regina and joined the Saskatchewan Association of Architects on July 5, 1941 (Reg. # 148). A year later he joined the navy and served as the base planning officer for the east coast.

In 1958, Black Larson McMillan and Partners was formed, which included: Ken Black, Harry Larson, Ken McMillan, Grant Cumbers, Jim Varro, and Jack Burton. The language in the initial agreement was quite clear: "In the partnership, I (Ken Black) shall at all times be entitled to 50% of the profits and

will bear 50% of the losses. The other partners will be entitled to the remaining 50% of the profits and will bear the remaining 50% of the losses..."

Although Larson died tragically in 1969, Ken McMillan stuck with architecture for almost 50 years. By the time of McMillan's full retirement from the firm in 1996 (by then called McMillan, Lehrer, Ellard, Croft Architects), he had been responsible for the design or redesign of an astounding 90% of the health care facilities in Saskatchewan, including the Regina General and the Pasqua Hospital Regeneration projects and revisions to the Plains Health Centre (now SIAST campus).

## Harvesting Architects from the University of Manitoba

Ken Black's first year of business showed revenues of \$21,000 (ca \$254,000 in 2011 dollars) with a profit of \$9,700 (ca \$120,000 today) - a pretty good start. He knew that there would be a lot of architecture work to come, so began looking for architects to join his firm. Although a U of T graduate himself, he looked to the University of Manitoba because he strongly believed that Manitoba graduates would be far more at ease and productive in Saskatchewan than eastern graduates, and he more understanding of Saskatchewan's unique charms and challenging con-



Providence Place, Moose Jaw – part of the health care legacy of Ken McMillan.

struction environment. Among those graduates were: Ken McMillan (1948), Harry Larson (1949), Jack Burton (1950), Jim Varro (1953), and Don Lehrer (1957). Many other Saskatchewan architects worked at BLM, including Kiyoshi Izumi, Jim Sugiyama, Frank Moore and Hendrik Grolle. Black often commented that "Joe (Pettick) was about the only [Regina] architect who hadn't worked for the firm."

## One Way of Dealing with Feedback from the Boss ...

Ken McMillan recalled a very busy office in the 1950s. Black would spend most of the week travelling to various job sites throughout the province, or



Ken Black hands over the keys to another building (ca 1960). Regina Mayor Henry Baker and Premier T.C. Douglas are at the far left.



chasing work 'down East' and return to Regina on Friday. He would look over the week's output over the weekend and leave his comments and suggestions on the drawings, before heading back out on the road on Monday morning. Staff would return to work on Monday morning to find Black's comments, suggestions and changes on their drawings. "His handwriting was pretty well illegible," McMillan recalled. "After a year or so of trying to make sense of all the comments, I would choose the most practical from those that I could read and then I would take an eraser and remove the rest."

## Every Coin has Two Sides

Dutch architect Hendrik Grolle worked for H.K. Black in the mid 1950s. 1957 was a successful year: revenues totalled almost \$275,000 (over \$2.3 million today) with a clear profit of \$67,000, (over \$550,000 today). Late that year Black distributed Christmas bonus cheques to the staff. Grolle recalled that occasion: "In December of 1957 I had been approached by Mr. Portnall with an offer of work and a partnership which I accepted. I can remember the scene in Mr. Black's office as if it was yesterday. The meeting started cordially with some very kind words about my work during the year, and then he pushed the Christmas bonus cheque across the desk to me. I then thought that the time was right to tell him that I had accepted Mr. Portnall's offer. Mr. Black reached across the desk and retrieved the Christmas bonus cheque. "I guess you won't be needing that anymore," he said."

A few years earlier Frank Moore (now practicing in Prince Albert) worked for Black and recalled his year with the firm: "I got my first job after



The round Capitol Records Building in Los Angeles, and the not-round Health and Welfare Building.

graduation from the University of Manitoba at the office of H. K. Black Architect and Engineer in June of 1954. My employment lasted about one year. Mid-way through the year an opportunity to purchase my first car was facilitated by a loan from Ken Black. When my employment came to an end, I asked him about the balance of the loan still outstanding. He responded by saying....'don't worry about it, you'll pay it as soon as you can.' That is the kind of man that Ken Black was."

## You Spin Me Right Round ...

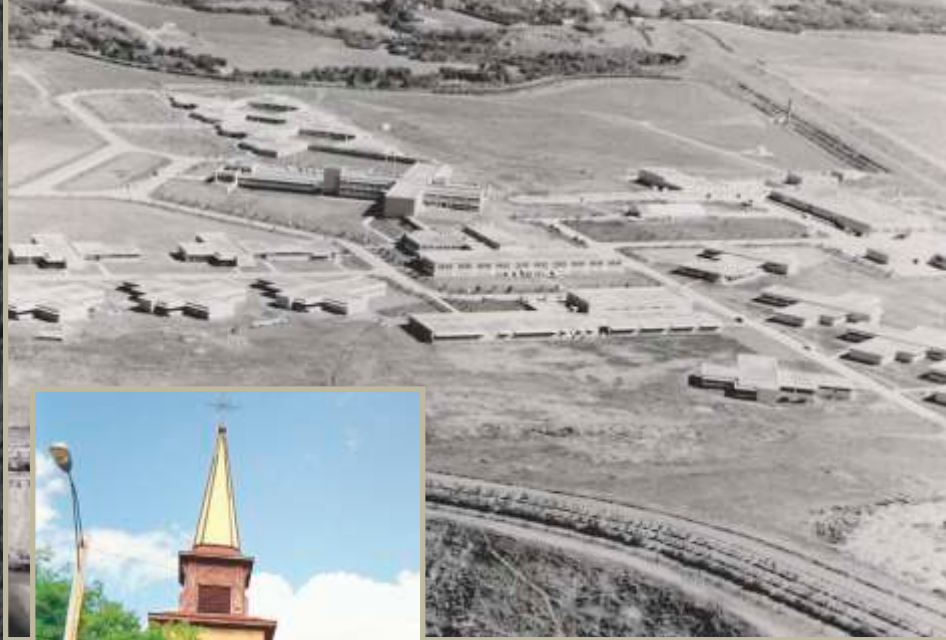
The firm was successful in obtaining a fair amount of work with the provincial government separate from the

health care field. One of their 1958 commissions was for a new provincial government office building in Regina. The initial design was circular, based on the Capital Records building in Los Angeles, which had been completed in 1956.

The unique design and renderings went through several layers in the provincial bureaucracy until Ken Black and Ken McMillan ended up in the office of Provincial Treasurer Clarence Fines. Black recalled a very brief conversation. Fines was brought up short by the image of a round building, filled with public servants, sitting prominently on Albert Street. "The public already thinks that all we do is spin







around in circles,” Fines said. A less startling design was called for: “The most amount of space for the least amount of money,” was how Ken Black recalled the new instructions from the client. The Health and Welfare Building, now known as Lloyd Place, opened in 1959.

## 1968 – A Representative Year for the Firm

That year, 65 projects generated \$417,000 (ca. \$2.7 million today) in revenue. The firm was profitable – just over \$237,000 (ca. \$1.5 million today) was distributed to the partners. These jobs included hospitals in Lanigan, Lucky Lake, Moose Jaw, Porcupine Plains, Redvers, Shaunavon, Swift Current, Wadena, Weyburn, Wolseley, and Wynyard as well as the alterations to the

Wascana Hospital in Regina and special care homes in Canora and Moosomin. The firm also designed schools in Avonlea, Balcarres, Briercrest, Carrot River, Kamsack, Milestone, Moose Jaw, Nipawin, Ogema, Oxbow, Pelly, Regina, Tisdale and Weyburn. Other major projects that year included the Murray Memorial Library at the U of S, the Income Tax Building and the Hudson Bay Store in Regina, plus a dozen or so smaller projects including three Bank of Montreal branches, eight churches and the Ituna Town Office.

## No Job Too Big, No Job Too Small

In May of 1955, Black's firm completed the sprawling Saskatchewan Training School (now known as Valley View Centre) at Moose Jaw. The job had taken approximately six years to complete and cost \$8 million (ca. \$70 million today).

At about the same time the firm redesigned the front steps for Qu'Appelle's Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church (built in 1906). The job was completed in a month and cost \$200 (ca. \$1,700 today).

## Mixing Architecture and Business

By 1960, most of the actual architecture work of the firm, which employed up to 75 people, had been

delegated to Harry Larson and Ken McMillan. Black concentrated on the business side: getting the work; making sure that the clients paid their bills; making sure that the firm paid its bills; and ensuring that at the end of the year there was a profit. His attention to the bottom line ensured the firm's survival through the lean years, when many competitors and former colleagues who had branched out on their own fell by the wayside.

Black became involved in property management and development and several other businesses. Early ventures included a partnership with R. A. Kramer and Fred Hill to erect Regina's Financial Building in 1959, which was one of the first high rises to use curtain-wall construction. Black Larson McMillan rented most of the ground floor.

Ken Black retired from architecture in 1972 and the firm was reconstituted as BLM Architects Ltd. He remained as a consultant until 1975 and passed away in Regina in 1993, age 81, almost 59 years after his first brush with architecture. W

• by Don Black



H.K. (Ken) Black in 1964, age 52.



BLM Architects Ltd. in 1985. (l. to r.) Don Lehrer, Jim Varro, Don Miller, Jack Burton, Ken McMillan, Brian Hanna and Alex Hermann.

## SAA Salute Concludes

This is the fourth and final series of articles to salute the **100th Anniversary of the Saskatchewan Association of Architects!** Congratulations SAA as you enter your second century of helping grow the province | **WORTH** MAGAZINE